

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW TEXAS

The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) assesses State performance during a specified time period with respect to seven child welfare outcomes in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being and with respect to seven systemic factors. The assessment is based on information from the following sources:

- The Statewide Assessment prepared by the State child welfare agency—the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (PRS);
- The State Data Profile prepared by the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
- Reviews of 50 cases from three counties in the State; and
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted in all three counties and in the State capital) with a wide range of State and local stakeholders including children, parents, foster parents, various levels of State and local PRS personnel, collaborating agency personnel, school personnel, mental health providers, court personnel, legislators, and attorneys.

The State achieved substantial conformity with all seven systemic factors with many documented strengths, for example:

- The Statewide Information System - Child and Adult Protective System (CAPS);
- Agency Responsiveness to the Community, including the Strength Through External Partners (STEP) initiative;
- The Case Review System, including administrative and judicial reviews, and;
- The advanced Quality Assurance System, which significantly mirrors the CFSR process.

The State, however, did not achieve substantial conformity with six of the seven safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes and the State also did not meet the national standards for measures relating to the length of time to achieve adoption and to children's placement stability while in foster care. The most significant concern with regard to outcomes is the State's inconsistency in achieving permanency for children in foster care. For example, Permanency Outcome 1—Children have permanency and stability in their living situations—was found to be substantially achieved in only 72 percent of the cases reviewed. Key areas assessed as part of this outcome that were identified as needing improvement were the stability of foster care placements (item 6), the appropriateness of the permanency goal for children (item 7), attainment of permanency through reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives (item 8), and attainment of permanency through adoption (item 9).

The State also did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 (Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect) or Safety Outcome 2 (Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate). During the case review, 86 percent of the cases were found to have been substantially achieved for Safety Outcome 1 and 77.6 percent of the cases were found to have been substantially achieved for Safety Outcome 2. Key areas assessed as part of these outcomes that were identified as needing improvement involved the provision of services to families to protect children in home and prevent removal (item 3) and managing the risk of harm to children (item 4). The State did significantly meet the national standards related to repeat maltreatment and maltreatment of children in foster care.

Another area of concern related to Child Well Being Outcome 1—Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs. During the case review, only 70 percent of the cases were found to have substantially achieved this outcome, which included assessments of whether children and families received needed services (item 17), children and families were involved in case planning (item 18), and the frequency of caseworker visits with children and parents (items 19 and 20).

Finally, the State also was not in substantial conformity with Child Well Being Outcome 2 (Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs) or Child Well Being Outcome 3 (Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs). For Well Being Outcome 2, 84.2 percent of the cases were found to have substantially achieved the outcome and for Well Being Outcome 3, 72.9 percent of the cases were found to have substantially achieved the outcome.

Despite these areas of concern, the State was found to be in substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2—The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children—with 93.8 percent of the cases reviewed reported to have substantially achieved this outcome. The State also met the national standards for measures relating to maltreatment recurrence, maltreatment in foster care, re-entries into foster care, and achieving finalized adoptions within 24 months of entry into foster care. In addition, the following individual items assessed for the seven outcomes were rated as a Strength

- Initiating investigations to child maltreatment reports in a timely manner and consistent with agency policy guidelines (item 1).
- Preventing repeat maltreatment (item 2).
- Preventing foster care re-entry (item 5).
- Implementing diligent efforts to achieve other planned permanent living arrangements (item 10).
- Placing children in close proximity to their biological families (item 11) and with relatives (item 15) when possible and in the children's best interest and promoting relationships between children in care and their parents (item 16).
- Encouraging visitation with parents and siblings (item 13).

In contrast to the assessment of performance on outcome measures, the CFSR process determined that the State was in substantial conformity with all seven systemic factors. The only indicators identified as needing improvement with respect to systemic factors concerned the involvement of parents in developing case plans (item 25), the variation in the availability of needed services across the State (item 36), and the need to recruit more foster care and adoptive families (item 44).

The following is a summary of the CFSR findings with respect to outcomes and systemic factors.

KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES

I. SAFETY

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Status of Safety Outcome S1 – Not in Substantial Conformity

The Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services was in substantial conformity to the national standards related to Abuse and Neglect in foster care. However, Texas did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1 because 86 percent of applicable cases were rated as having substantially achieved Safety Outcome 1, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity. Although the indicators assessed as part of this outcome were both rated as a Strength, there were 7 cases rated as Area Needing Improvement in relation to the two relevant items for this outcome, which resulted in those cases being rated as having partially achieved, rather than having substantially achieved, the outcome.

Item 1. Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 92 percent of the cases, the State responded to a maltreatment report in a timely manner. Two of the stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that the State has begun to implement an Internet reporting system that they believe will further expedite response time. This system appears to have been recently piloted with school professionals and to have been positively received by this group.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the following findings:

- In 90 percent of the cases, there were no instances of multiple substantiated or indicated maltreatment reports occurring 6 months apart and during the period under review; and
- According to the State data profile, the incidence of repeat maltreatment in the State was 4.2 percent, which meets the national standard of 6.1 percent.
- According to the State data profile, the incidence of maltreatment of children in foster care was .29 percent, which meets the national standard of .57 percent.

Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Status of Safety Outcome S2 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Texas did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that 77.6 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as having substantially achieved this outcome, which is less than the 90 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity. A summary of findings of the specific items assessed relevant to this outcome is presented below.

Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal

Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 81 percent of the applicable cases reviewers found that the State had made diligent efforts to maintain children safely in their homes, but there were concerns related to this issue in 19 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. One problem identified was a lack of consistency with regard to the State's efforts to follow up with families on service participation. Another concern was that the workers are not always consistent in their efforts to assess families or provide families with needed services. Stakeholders attributed both of these problems to the high levels of caseworker turnover experienced in the State. Stakeholders suggested that caseworker turnover usually results in additional caseload burdens for remaining staff and/or cases being assigned to new staff before they have sufficient experience and training.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 80 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that the State had made diligent efforts to reduce the risk of harm to children, but there were concerns related to this issue in 20 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the implementation of a risk-based rather than an incident-based assessment correlates with an increase in the rate of children entering substitute care as a result of an investigation, and an increase in the number of cases "screened in" for investigation. However, stakeholders, while praising the risk assessment approach, expressed the opinion that high rates of worker turnover and high caseloads have a negative impact on the ability of the workers to adequately follow up on information obtained through the risk assessment process to reduce risk in cases in which children remain in their homes.

II. PERMANENCY

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Status of Permanency Outcome P1 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Texas did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that 71.9 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as having substantially achieved Permanency Outcome 1, which is less than the 90 percent required for an overall rating of substantial conformity. In addition, the State did not meet the national standards for the percentage of reunifications

occurring within 12 months of removal from home or the percentage of children with two or fewer placements during their first 12 months in foster care. However, the State did meet the national standards for the percentage of adoptions occurring within 24 months of removal from home, and the percentage of entries into foster care in Federal Fiscal Year 1999 that were re-entries within 12 months of a discharge from a prior foster care episode. A summary of findings of the specific items assessed relevant to this outcome is presented below.

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

Item 5 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because the State incidence of foster-care re-entry (1.5%) meets the national standard of 8.6 percent and the item was rated as a Strength in 91 percent of the 32 applicable cases. The Statewide Assessment suggests that there may be an error in the AFCARS extract with respect to the number of removal episodes and that the incidence of foster care re-entry in the State may be higher than that indicated in the State Data Profile. However, the Statewide Assessment also indicated that the higher ratings are still within the national standards. The Statewide Assessment attributes the low rate of foster care re-entry in part to the policy of maintaining open cases for 3 to 6 months after reunifying children before terminating PRS legal responsibility.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 78 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that children had stability in their foster care placements, but there were concerns related to stability of foster care placements in 22 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. In addition, the State's percentage of children in foster care who experienced no more than 2 placements during their first 12 months (71.2%) did not meet the national standard of 86.7 percent. The Statewide Assessment attributed the incidence of multiple moves in foster care to (1) insufficient placement resources; (2) the practice of initially placing children in emergency placements for assessment purposes; (3) unplanned requests by foster parents to have the child removed; and (4) the State level of care system that can result in the movement of children into other placement settings to meet the children's needs. Both stakeholders and case reviews indicated that children are placed in emergency placements for reasons other than assessment, and there is some indication that if the State provided greater supports to foster parents, they may be less likely to request a child's removal from their homes.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 78 percent of the applicable cases reviewed reviewers determined that the State had established an appropriate goal in a timely manner, but there were concerns regarding appropriateness of permanency goals in 22 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. The Statewide Assessment noted that it is State policy for staff to seek to have children in permanent placements within 12 months from the date they come into care, to the extent possible depending on the child's particular needs and circumstances and the available resources. The Statewide Assessment also noted that a permanency goal is considered achieved when the child is in the placement that is intended to be permanent and is consistent with the permanency goal, and appropriate legal action has been achieved.

Item 8. Reunification, Guardianship or Permanent Placement with Relatives

This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement primarily because the State's percentage of reunifications occurring within 12 months of entry into foster care (64.4%) did not meet the national standard (76.2%). In understanding the State's data with respect to reunifications occurring within 12 months of removal, it is important to take into account the State policy of maintaining legal custody for 3 to 6 months after physical reunification. While this policy may adversely affect the State's ability to meet the national standard with respect to reunification, it enhances the State's ability to meet the national standard with respect to foster care re-entries. Consequently, it may be seen as supporting children's safety.

Item 9. Adoption

Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because, although the State's percentage of finalized adoptions within 24 months of entry into foster care (43.7%) meets the national standard of 32 percent, the case review process found that 43 percent of the applicable cases were rated as an Area Needing Improvement for this item. In addition, stakeholders commenting on this issue tended to view timeliness of adoptions as a key issue for the State.

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

This item was assigned an overall rating of Strength because the item was rated as a Strength in all applicable cases. Information provided in the Statewide Assessment supports stakeholders' opinions regarding the strength of programs providing independent living services to youth who are expected to eventually be emancipated from the foster care system. In addition, the Statewide Assessment noted that although long-term foster care is an allowable permanent solution under the Texas permanency statutes, it is not an option that the State routinely chooses for children. In fact, a caseworker cannot select this permanency goal until approval is given by a program director.

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Status of Permanency Outcome P2 – Substantial Conformity

Texas achieved substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that reviewers rated this outcome as substantially achieved in 93.8 percent of the cases, which exceeds the 90 percent required for a finding of substantial conformity.

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in all applicable cases children were placed in close proximity to parents or close relatives. This is consistent with information provided in the Statewide Assessment indicating that the State makes every effort to place children in close proximity to their home of origin. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, 30.5 percent of Texas children are placed "out of area," and this usually occurs when the local area does not have resources for children with serious behavioral or mental health problems.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 84 percent of applicable cases reviewers determined that the State had made diligent efforts to keep siblings together, but there were concerns regarding placement with siblings in 16 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. Information in the Statewide Assessment suggests that one of the problems in maintaining siblings together is the shortage of foster homes, particularly homes that can take large sibling groups.

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 85 percent of the cases reviewers determined that the State had made diligent efforts to facilitate visits between the child and his or her parents and siblings. The Statewide Assessment provides support for this finding and indicates that while a child is in foster care, the parents and the child have a right to maintain regular contact with one another unless the court restricts contact or the parents have voluntarily relinquished parental rights or had their parental rights terminated by the court.

Item 14. Preserving connections

Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 84 percent of the applicable cases the reviewers determined that the State had made diligent efforts to preserve the child's connections, but there were concerns regarding preserving connections in 16 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. Although there were many cases in which reviewers noted that connections were maintained, there was a lack of consistency across workers in making efforts to maintain these connections. This may be attributed to worker turnover that results in caseworkers who do not have extensive experience in maintaining children's linkages to their families, heritage, and communities.

Item 15. Relative placement

Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 94 percent of the applicable cases reviewed, reviewers determined that the State had made diligent efforts to access and assess relatives as potential placement resources for children in foster care.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in all applicable cases, reviewers determined that the State had made diligent efforts to maintain and support the bond between parents and children.

III. WELL-BEING

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

Status of Well-Being Outcome WB1 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Texas did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that this outcome was rated as substantially achieved for 70 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity.

Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 72 percent of the applicable cases reviewers felt that the needs and services of children, parents, and/or foster parents had been adequately addressed by the State, but there were concerns regarding this issue in 28 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. The key problems identified were a lack of availability of key services, and a lack of caseworker follow up with families to ensure that services are in place.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 79 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that parents and children had been appropriately involved in the case planning process, but there were concerns regarding this issue in 21 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. This finding is somewhat contrary to information reported in the Statewide Assessment. According to the Statewide Assessment, CPS policy and Licensing standards require that parents be invited to participate in developing the child's case plan unless the parents cannot be found, parental rights have been terminated, or the parents have refused to participate in the child's case. Despite these policies, the case reviews indicate that there continue to be cases in which parents and/or children are not adequately involved in the planning process.

Item 19. Worker visits with child

Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 82 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that the frequency of worker visits with children was sufficient to support their safety and well-being, but there were concerns related to worker visits with children in 18 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. Although as noted in the Statewide Assessment, PRS policy requires at least one monthly contact between the caseworker and the child/caregivers for foster care cases, and appropriate contact with children in FBSS cases, the case reviews indicate that there is not consistent adherence to this policy.

Item 20. Worker visits with parents

Item 20 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 81 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that the frequency of workers' visits with parents was sufficient to ensure children's safety and well-being, but there were concerns related to workers' visits with parents in 19 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. In the cases where there were concerns regarding workers' visits with parents reviewers determined that the frequency of workers' visits with parents was not sufficient to ensure children's safety and well-being and typically occurred less frequently than once a month. All of the cases assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement for this item were in the urban county, which also experienced high levels of caseworker turnover. Consequently, caseworker turnover may again be responsible for the inconsistencies in case practice with respect to visits with parents. According to the Statewide Assessment, although

Texas policy requires sufficient contact with parents, worker turnover and caseload sizes may be significant barriers to full adherence to policy requirements.

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

Status of Well-Being Outcome WB2 – Not in Substantial Conformity

Texas did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that only 84.2 percent of the applicable cases reviewed were rated as having substantially achieved this outcome, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

Item 21. Educational needs of the child.

Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because the State did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2, which involves the assessment of item 21 alone. Also, in 16 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the State had not acted appropriately in meeting the children's educational needs. Findings of the Statewide Assessment are consistent with the case review findings with respect to foster care cases, but not with respect to in-home services cases. According to the Statewide Assessment, case readings conducted in preparation for the Federal Review indicated that educational issues for children in foster care were appropriately addressed in 83.3 percent of cases read and educational issues for children in FBSS cases were appropriately addressed in 100 percent of cases read.

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Status Of Well-Being Outcome 3 - Not in Substantial Conformity

Texas did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 72.9 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. A summary of findings for specific items assessed as relevant to this outcome is presented below.

Item 22. Physical health of the child

Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 82 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that the State had been effective in meeting the health care needs of the children, but there were concerns related to this issue in 18 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. The key problems identified with respect to foster care cases were (1) failure to conduct a health assessment in a timely manner and (2) a lack of documentation in the case record of health information, such as immunization records, and services provided in response to health assessments. The key problem identified for in-home services cases was that there were health issues of concern for the children, but the State did not address them. According to the Statewide Assessment, these findings are contrary to Texas' policy. The

Statewide Assessment noted that case readings conducted in preparation for the Federal Review found that health issues for children in FBSS cases were appropriately addressed in 90.9 percent of cases read.

Item 23. Mental health of the child

Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 82.5 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that the State had been effective in meeting the mental health needs of the children, but there were concerns related to this issue in 17.5 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. According to the Statewide Assessment, case readings conducted in preparation for the Federal Review indicated that mental health issues for children in care were appropriately addressed in 91.7 percent of cases read and mental health issues for children in FBSS cases were being appropriately addressed in 80 percent of cases read.

KEY FINDINGS RELATING TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS

IV. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Status of Statewide Information System – Substantial Conformity

Texas is in substantial conformity with the factor of Statewide Information System. Findings with respect to the item assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 24. State is operating a Statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months has been in foster care.

Item 24 was assigned a rating of Strength because the Texas Statewide information system and related data and information technology capabilities far exceed the requirements of the review. The Texas Child and Adult Protective System (CAPS) was implemented in 1996 and functions as Texas's comprehensive Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). CAPS is available statewide 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and supports all aspects of casework from intake to post adoption services. CAPS also supports Adult Protective Services (APS) and Child Care Licensing (CCL) casework and investigations. CAPS goes far beyond being able to identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.

V. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Status With Regard To Case Review System - Substantial Conformity

Texas is in substantial conformity with the factor of Case Review System. Findings with respect to specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 25. Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions

Item 25 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although PRS ensures that every child has a written case plan, there is evidence from the CFSR that involving parents as partners in developing the case plan is not always a consistent practice among caseworkers.

Item 26. Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.

Item 26 was assigned a rating of Strength because the general finding of the CFSR process was that PRS provides periodic administrative and sometimes court reviews of the status of each child at least once every 6 months. The Statewide Assessment also notes that although Federal requirements are to have either administrative or court reviews, Texas does both.

Item 27. Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.

Item 27 is rated as a Strength because PRS policy ensures that each child in foster care has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, Texas employs both administrative and court hearings to review children's progress toward permanency.

Item 28. Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

Item 28 is rated as a Strength because the Texas permanency initiative/legislation exceeds ASFA requirements. According to the Statewide Assessment, legislation was passed in Texas in June 1997 that launched a permanency initiative beginning on January 1, 1998 to bring prompt legal resolution to PRS cases. Under this legislation, children who come into the State's temporary legal care must have final legal orders issued within 12 months, with the possibility of a one-time, 6-month, court-ordered extension.

Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

Item 29 was rated as a Strength because the State provides a process for notifying foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers regarding reviews and hearings and provides an opportunity for them to be heard.

VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Status of Quality Assurance System - Substantial Conformity

Texas is in substantial conformity with the factor of Quality Assurance System. Findings with respect to the specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

Item 30 was assigned a rating of Strength because the State has the necessary standards in place. In addition, the State must verify and monitor all of its foster and adoptive homes for compliance with minimum standards before and after verification.

Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

Item 31 was assigned a rating of Strength because the State operates an effective quality assurance (QA) system and is moving toward using the model implemented by the CFSR process. There was general consensus among stakeholders that CAPS is a major facilitating factor in the QA process and that it allows QA to be an ongoing process, because CAPS is an ongoing system. Stakeholders expressed some mixed opinions regarding the involvement of external stakeholders in the QA process, although many stakeholders expressed praise for the STEP (Strength Through External Partnerships) initiative, which involves a survey of all external stakeholders regarding the State's performance in each of the areas covered by the CFSR.

VII. TRAINING

Status With Respect To Training - Substantial Conformity

Texas is in substantial conformity with the factor of Training. Findings with respect to items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.

Item 32 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because of the high quality of the State's staff development and training program. According to the Statewide Assessment, the State operates a Basic Skills Development (BSD) training program that is the initial training provided to child welfare agency staff. All newly hired CPS Specialists receive BSD trainings held in each of the eleven regional training units. Upon successful completion of the BSD training, new hires return to assigned units and begin assuming caseload responsibilities.

Another available staff development program is the Supervisor Management Training. The purpose of CPS Supervisor Management training is to provide newly promoted/hired supervisors with knowledge and skills in managing CPS units and supervising CPS caseworkers in the delivery of quality services.

Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.

Item 33 was assigned a rating of Strength because there is an array of ongoing training opportunities for staff that address the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties.

Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

Item 34 is rated as a Strength because the State provides quality training for foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities. According to the Statewide Assessment, training of foster families is supported through minimum standards and guidelines for child-placing agencies. The only gap remaining in training is in the area of relative placements, which are unlicensed. Efforts to address this issue have begun with an adoption opportunity grant, with expansion to other parts of the state being a possibility. For the most part, training of foster families uses the PRIDE curriculum.

VIII. SERVICE ARRAY

Status of Service Array - Substantial Conformity

Texas is in substantial conformity with the factor of Service Array. Findings with respect to items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

Item 35 is rated as a Strength because the CFSR process indicated that the State has a wide array of services to meet the needs of children and families. According to the Statewide Assessment, there are gaps in the service array associated with insufficient resources. Challenges include waiting lists, filled caseloads, limited placement resources for children with a higher level of mental health needs, language barriers, transportation needs, availability of resources in all parts of the State, and limited funding. Resource development by field staff and contract staff is an ongoing activity. Texas is aggressively pursuing grants and alternative funding sources to enhance its resources.

Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP.

Item 36 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because both the CFSR process and the Statewide Assessment determined that access to services is not equal across the State and services are particularly limited in rural areas. The general opinion expressed by stakeholders was that the State was too large and had too many rural areas to have the full range of services in every community. In addition, the services that are scarce in the larger communities, such as substance abuse treatment and mental health services for children, simply do not exist in smaller communities.

Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.

Item 37 is rated as a Strength because services can be tailored to meet the unique needs of children and families. Stakeholders suggested that in general, the services that are part of the State's service array can be individualized and that the State does not take a "cookie cutter" approach to providing services.

IX. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Status With Regard to Agency Responsiveness to the Community - Substantial Conformity

Texas is in substantial conformity with the factor of State Responsiveness to the Community. Findings with respect to specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 38. In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.

Item 38 was assigned a rating of Strength because the general finding of the CFSR review is that the Texas child welfare agency is highly responsive to the community. According to the Statewide Assessment, the value placed on the public/private partnerships, the support of the community towards the State, the attitude towards the community as a key stakeholder, legislative involvement in the process, and the enhanced communication between the State and the community as a whole have improved greatly over the last five years. Community initiatives exist in diverse projects from one end of the State to the other.

Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP.

Item 39 is rated as a Strength because the State works with community representatives in preparing the State's Child and Family Services Plan and other progress reports. According to the Statewide Assessment, the goals, objectives, and strategies that served as the basis for PRS's initial five-year Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) for Texas, submitted June 29, 1995, were developed by combining both internal and external consultation into a single process. This process facilitated coordination and collaboration among families, children, providers, funders, and policy makers.

Item 40. The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.

Item 40 was assigned a rating of Strength because the State coordinates its services under the CFSP with other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.

X. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

Status with regard to Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention – Substantial Conformity

Texas is in substantial conformity with the factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. Findings with respect to specific items assessed for this factor are presented below.

Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and childcare institutions which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.

Item 41 is rated as a Strength because the State has implemented standards that are in accordance with recommended national standards.

Item 42. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or childcare institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.

Item 42 was rated as a Strength because the standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or childcare institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds. Standards are applied equally to children placed in substitute care both in public and private verified foster care settings, and in relative placements.

Item 43. The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.

Item 43 is rated as a Strength because the State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances.

Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.

Item 44 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although the State has aggressive recruitment programs, the lack of foster homes and the retention of foster homes is problematic and impacts the State's ability to achieve stability and permanency for children.

Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

Item 45 was rated as a Strength because the State has implemented several initiatives to enhance cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review for the State of Texas. The findings were derived from the following documents and data collection procedures:

- The Statewide Assessment prepared by the State child welfare agency – the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (PRS);
- The State Data Profiles prepared by the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
- Reviews of 50 cases at three sites throughout the State; and
- Interviews with stakeholders including children, parents, foster parents, all levels of child welfare agency personnel at State and local offices, school personnel, mental health providers, court personnel, and attorneys. Interviews were conducted in all three sites and in Austin where the State DPRS is located.

The key characteristics of the 50 cases reviewed are the following:

- 26 cases were reviewed in Harris County (Houston), 12 in Cameron County (Brownsville), and 12 in Lubbock County.
- 32 of the 50 cases reviewed were “foster care” cases (cases in which children were in the care and custody of the State child welfare agency and in an out-of-home placement at some time during the period under review), and 18 were “in-home cases” (cases in which families received services while children remained in their homes or in voluntary placements).
- All 50 cases had been open cases at some time during the period under review; 19 of the cases were closed by the State during the period under review. Of the 19 closed cases, 12 (63%) were child protective services cases.
- For the 50 cases reviewed, the primary reasons for opening a child welfare case were the following:
 - Neglect (not including medical neglect) - 21 cases (42%)
 - Physical Abuse - 16 cases (32%)
 - Sexual Abuse - 7 cases (14%)
 - Parental Substance Abuse - 4 cases (8%)
 - Emotional Abuse - 1 case (2%)
 - Medical Neglect - 1 case (2%)

There was no correlation between the type of case (foster care or in-home services) and primary reasons for child welfare agency contact.

- For 26 (81%) of the 32 foster care cases, children entered foster care prior to the period under review and were in foster care during the entire period under review.

The first section of the report presents the CFSR findings relevant to the State’s achieving specific outcomes for children in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being. For each outcome, there is a table providing the degree of outcome achievement by site, a presentation of the State's status with regard to substantial conformity with the outcome, and a discussion of each item assessed as part of the overall outcome

assessment. The second section of the report provides an assessment and discussion of the systemic factors relevant to the child welfare agency's ability to achieve positive outcomes for children.